

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS

NO. 851. NEW SERIES.

SATURDAY, MARCH 21, 1885.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

## "THE FLOWER OF DOOM;"

OR, THE CONSPIRATOR.

A SHORT SERIAL STORY.

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### CHAPTER I. THE ATELIER.

WHY did the great Shakespeare put joyous thoughts into Romeo's breast on the eve of doom? Do ecstatic moods indeed visit mortals when nearing, unawares, the verge of dread catastrophe?

If disaster sends a herald in disguise, doth happier fortune treat us after the same fashion? Are such inner promptings hearkened to or distrusted ever?

These questions must occur to most of us at some time or other, since certain it is that dark presagement does not always betoken evil hap, nor will unwonted exuberance of spirits be surely followed by substantial joy. We feel more assurance about the connection between an unusual frame of mind and rare events. The common day is not begun with trumpet-like wakenings to destiny—thoughts like wings to lift above grosser air.

"I am far from being an unhappy woman," mused Bernarda Burke as she prepared for her busy day. "If Fortune has no more golden gifts in store, she has surely no bad either. Away, then, ye siren voices—ye stern forebodings! To work—to work! Therein lies sure healing for the bruised heart—redemption for all!"

The vast city might be searched from one end to the other for a brighter, more poetic spectacle than Bernarda's atelier presented an hour later. As if by magic, the bare, cold London room was transformed into a garden within garden, parterre within parterre. The blonde, rosy-

cheeked maidens now seated in rows before their embroidery-frames, and models of fresh flowers of richest hue, seemed to mock the place and the season, turning town October into June. The air was fragrant with scents, whilst bright and virginal as these living roses and lilies, and the ideal posies in silk and filose, were the golden braids, coral lips, and blue eyes of these English girls.

The mistress sat at the upper end of the lofty workroom, on an estrade raised above the rows of fair heads, flowers, and embroidery-frames, thus commanding the whole animated scene. But not by position only. Look, carriage, even dress, inspired authority. Whilst her apprentices, whose ages varied from fifteen to twenty, wore colours such as the young love and choose by happy instinct, Bernarda was soberly, although beautifully, dressed in black, relieved by a magnificent gold-and-brown pansy, worn on her breast just above the region of the heart.

The girls often wondered at their mistress's devotion to this especial flower. She never wore any other, and generally contrived to obtain splendid specimens that brightened her dress as a jewel. She was a tall, handsome woman, about thirty-two, with the dark hair, dark-blue eyes, and long silken lashes of a race famous for its beauty; also with a certain piquancy of contour and expression which made her very fascinating, especially to the blonde. Hardly one of the fair, rosy, light-haired Saxons but envied their teacher's raven hair, pearly skin, and dark eyebrows. Yet Bernarda could have no longer seemed young in their eyes. There must, then, have been some hidden charm of manner; some influence due to character, as well as looks; that subdued these careless young things, and made her task of keeping order,

and getting through a proper amount of work, so easy.

As Bernarda's stately figure moved backwards and forwards amid these avenues of bright girls, silken blossoms, and their living prototypes, there was no diminution of the girlish chatter and laughter well held in check. The empty-headed idler was expelled; but, so long as her pupils were sedulous, the mistress encouraged them to talk to each other in undertone. The perpetual chirping, as of so many birds, was a relief, and enabled her to think.

One or two rules, of course, had to be rigidly enforced. Bernarda's handsome brows knit darkly if any new comer forgot the observance of these, and ventured on a suggestion regarding the daily task, or, what the teacher resented much more, any personal remark directed to herself. On this especial morning, however, the entire school sinned in company, and had to be forgiven. As Bernarda sat alone on her raised platform above the rest, the sun, that had hitherto been obscured all the morning, suddenly disentangled itself from clouds—not sufficiently so as to flood the whole room, but just enough to envelope the one black-robed figure, and the white lilies she was busied upon, in warm golden light. The effect was strange and beautiful, and no wonder the young embroiderers seized upon it as an opportunity for unburdening themselves. For a moment every needle rested. Then one sentimentalist, more venturesome than the rest, cried out:

"Please forgive us! We must look at you whilst you sit like a saint in your aureole."

Bernarda smiled impatiently, and continued her own work as if determined for once to be indulgent. Truth to tell, she was herself conscious of a desire to break through routine, to burst this freezing silence.

Calm and dignified although she found her present mode of life, congenial as it was to one enamoured of natural beauty, there were yet moments when she longed to close her atelier and begin life anew.

The incident of the golden ray, now blinding her, and wrapping her round as a vesture, was a vexation, since it made her realise how much she had in common with these careless, restless girls. Was she not also ready to catch at any excuse for wearying of duty, for letting thought stray beyond the limit of actuality? Yes, she

acknowledged that it was so. Life must have more to give than a daily portion of restful toil.

In a moment the sunlight cloud was gone, and another exclamation went the round of the room. On the track of that warm effulgence now came an almost phenomenal gloom, which, like the glory, fastened upon Bernarda where she sat, hamming her round about with subtle cloud as she had before been enthroned in dazzling brightness.

"We cannot see you. Speak to us!" cried the girl who had before been spokeswoman of the rest. "Oh, Miss Burke, good and evil luck will surely visit you to-day."

"Foolish children! I will then hand over the good luck to you!" Bernarda replied with one of her quietly sarcastic smiles. "Go home, all of you, and make what holiday you may in the fog."

The place rang with a merry cheer, and in a few minutes the embroidery-frames were covered up, the baskets piled with gorgeous silks and flosses put away, the flowers carried off to the conservatory; Bernarda found herself alone in the bare, silent, unpictorial room; no blotch of colour left but that brilliant flower of hers, which like a gem, a butterfly, a humming-bird, now pierced the leaden London atmosphere, shining amid the gloom.

She glanced down at her heartsease as she now passed out of the deserted atelier, and readjusted it tenderly. This fairy thing was the only companion of her solitude, ever fresh and perpetually beauteous, renewed day by day as if by magic. Was it not like some undisclosed memories that accompany us wherever we go, perchance saddening but yet beautifying the common ways of life?

And once again she checked the disturbing thoughts that had come unbidden a few hours before.

"What have I to do any more with joys or terrors, prognostics of evil or blissful harbingers? To work, to work! Therein lies healing for the bruised heart, redemption for all!"

#### CHAPTER II. THE CONSPIRATOR.

THE gloaming had come, a time Bernarda devoted on fine days to such business as lay out of doors. To-day, however, the heavy cloak of fog that enveloped the streets kept her indoors. It was a pleasant place to walk and think in, this airy, spacious workroom, dimly lighted from

above, and Bernarda's calling gave her much to think about. To-day, as she walked up and down the silent atelier, she was contriving a set of arras destined to carry the fame of her little school across the wide Atlantic. She soon became so absorbed in the pleasing task that she did not hear a gentle tap at the door. Then her young maid-servant intruded with a card in her hand, saying that the bearer awaited an interview.

"Light the lamp in my sitting-room. I will follow at once," Bernarda said carelessly. She was subject to interruptions at this hour, and cards were matters of daily occurrence also. Rich people would call to order or inspect embroidery, parents to apprentice their children, young girls in search of employment, unknown artists to proffer designs. No day without its visitants.

Still dwelling on her arras, and without looking at the card, she went downstairs to the little parlour set aside for her own exclusive use. What a contrast it presented to the spacious, chilly workroom she had just quitted! All here was warm, rich, pictorial. And amid these belongings which seemed part of her, the little piano, handsew of her toil, the books, pictures, and works of art bought with her earnings, she dared to be herself. The black abbess-like gown, with its plain folds, was discarded as soon as her day's work had come to an end, and her pansy now rested on a background as brilliant as itself.

A fire burned brightly in the clean porcelain stove, and the lamp shed abundant light as she entered the room where her visitor waited alone. He stood conspicuous on the hearthrug, with his bared head turned towards the door.

Quick as lightning all things became clear to her, those undefined misgivings, those promptings of hope, the golden cloud, the shadow unutterable!

"Edgeworth!" she cried, and that was all.

She was a very proud woman, and accustomed to exercise self-control. When, without a word more, he bent forward and kissed her on the brow, she still remained calm and collected, though frozen into haughty silence.

The man's composure also seemed for a moment to desert him.

"You had my card? I did not intend to startle you," he said apologetically.

She dropped into a chair, and the un-

heeded card fell from her passive hand. He stooped down, picked it up, and coolly replaced it in his pocket-book. Then, depositing hat and stick on the table, by a matter-of-fact speech he broke the ice.

"Can we talk undisturbed for an hour?" he asked. "I have something to say to you."

"Certainly," Bernarda made reply, almost carelessly, as she handed him a chair. "Pray be easy," she added as she saw him glance at the door; "the only creature in the house is my little maid. You can hear her singing in her kitchen downstairs. If anyone should call, the door-bell will give due warning, and I have but to deny admittance."

He did not look entirely reassured.

"You must still remember our mother-tongue," he said. "Suppose——"

She broke in impatiently, even scornfully:

"No need to use outlandish jargon within these incurious walls. We are perfectly secure from eavesdroppers, I assure you."

The first part of her speech evidently disconcerted him, and before opening his lips again, he perused her steadily. For a brief spell they sat looking at each other.

He was, like herself, strikingly handsome, and the thought must have occurred to others, if it had never struck themselves, how strong was the likeness between the pair. It was a semblance due to race rather than kinship. His temples, like hers, were hidden by raven curls; the dark blue eyes were shaded with long silken lashes; he had the self-same rich, tawny skin, fine features, and kindling, yet disdainful smile. There was, however, a difference no less marked. Whilst Bernarda, although perfectly dignified and self-possessed, was not without a certain proud timidity and almost girlish shyness, due, perhaps, to her solitary life, you saw at a glance that he was something more than a mere man of the world. Speech, demeanour—nay, his very dress, indicated the cosmopolitan and, if not the courtier, at least one familiar with all conditions of society—perhaps the humblest—certainly not the least elevated.

Such things betray themselves in a man's most insignificant action, also that easy self-adaptation, versatility, amiableness, roughly summed up under the head of good manners, but which really mean much more than outward politeness. An adequate share in

the world's graver concerns, the give and take required in the management of public business or the leadership of masses, the necessity men of action are under of keeping their impulses well under control, naturally give them an advantage over those who move in small, circumscribed spheres.

Bernarda realised all this in a moment, and the conviction helped to make her self-reliant. He would not add to her embarrassment. Whatever he had to say would be said kindly, delicately, and with due regard for her feelings. He began with a question, smilingly put.

"Why did you use that expression just now?" he asked. "'Outlandish jargon!' Is it thus you speak of the tongue of your fathers? Have you, then, abjured your country?"

"Oh, our unhappy country," she cried, looking ready to burst into tears; "must we talk of our country? Yet, of course, I know all. Your rôle is no secret."

"Why should it be a secret?" he said, then looked at her as if to read her inmost thoughts. He added in a voice that changed to gentle insinuation: "First we have to talk of ourselves. You are well and prosperous, I see," and he glanced round the warm-tinted, elegant little room approvingly, "but hardly satisfied with such a lot, I feel sure—hardly happy?"

Bernarda's frank, impetuous nature rose up in rebellion against the irony of this speech—an irony that was not intended, she felt sure of that, but that galled nevertheless. Memories fresh and sweet as the flower she wore on her breast lived once more. The youthfulness and fervid hope of a vanished yest'reen came back. One day of life, its best and brightest, seemed to revive.

"Why have you come after all these years?" she cried passionately. "What can it matter to you whether I am happy or not? Speak out. Make known your errand, then go away and let me be."

Her distress evidently troubled him, and rising a second time, he kissed her on the forehead. That kiss, so respectfully, dispassionately accorded, yet evidently intended both as a sign of reconciliation and apology, did not comfort, but at least tended to calm her. It served to bring with sudden force the difference between his condition of mind and her own. They had loved each other passionately once, and now met suddenly after fateful years. Yet whilst the very sound of his

voice calling her by name, and the touch of his hand, could bring back the past that had been his and her own, could make this estrangement seem unreal and impossible, he remained calm and almost indifferent. The conviction forced her back on her womanly pride. She determined, no matter at what present cost to herself, to appear calm and indifferent too.

"I will tell you why I have come," he began, stooping to pick up the light shawl she had thrown round her shoulders, adjusting it with prompt care for her comfort, yet without the slightest trace of tenderness in the act. He saw that in spite of the warmth of the room, his sudden apparition had made her tremble—that was all. "Years ago I did you a great wrong," he went on, fixing his dark, penetrating eyes upon her. "Poor, obscure, and friendless, I then promised to marry you, and broke my troth. Rich, famous"—here he smiled an odd, yet winning smile—"abounding in friends and followers, I am here to redeem it. My errand to-day is to offer you my fortunes and my name."

She was too much overtaken by surprise to make any answer. He went on in the same prosaic, straightforward, friendly way, no vestige of lover-like enthusiasm or demonstrativeness in voice, look, or manner, yet a keen desire to gain his point evidently actuating each syllable.

"You protested at one time that you fully and freely forgave me. A proud, high-spirited woman could not feel otherwise. But in spite of these silent years, I have never forgotten the past, and have never forgiven myself. Pray believe that."

"It was a wild dream. Let us forget it," Bernarda said, stirred to hidden depths by his strange indifference, and still stranger fervour. Since it was plain that his love for her was a forgotten thing, certainly no joy, hardly a memory any longer, why then had he come with this word "marriage" on his lips?

They sat looking at each other, these two who had once been lovers, with hardly as they once fancied in their fond foolish exaltation, any secrets between them, any separate interests possible, no matter in what remote future; and now, after ten brief years, utter strangers could hardly be so wide apart. But the saddest experience of all was the conviction that this blank, awful separation, this wall of granite which seemed to crush the very breath of life out of her, was scarcely perceptible to him.



He was self-controlled, pleasant, persuasive, without an effort, without apparently an emotion.

"There will be time enough to talk over the past, ample leisure for explanation on both sides," he said, smiling, and there was wonderful fascination in the smile that lit up his dark face, "if you will only marry me. Give your assent then, Bernarda; throw in your lot with that of the conspirator!"

## THE OLD FRENCH THEATRE.

### IN TWO PARTS. PART II.

WE owe the term, "*le siècle de Louis Quatorze*," to Voltaire. It was the golden age of literature in France, and a large share of the honour belongs to the dramatists. Corneille, Molière, and Racine—contemporaries as a matter of fact—are foremost on the list; they excelled all other playwrights before their time; and in the opinion of those best qualified to judge have not yet been surpassed.

Pierre Corneille was born at Rouen, in 1606. His first play, *Mélite*, appeared in 1629. As this was thought to be superior to most comedies of the time, the young man was much gratified, and gave up the law for the theatre. We have Corneille's own authority for saying that he found his new profession remunerative, and also that he took a pride in it. He must have worked hard and fast, for before the end of the year 1636 he had produced eight comedies and one tragedy, all of five acts and in verse. His reputation stood high; but the thorn in his rose was the proud spirit of Richelieu. Hitherto, the thorn had only scratched him, as he was enjoying the pleasures of the flower-bed. Corneille was one of the five authors whom the Cardinal Minister paid to write plays for him. He supplied them with a plot—not of his own invention—and set them all to work upon it; each to write one act. A worse way of writing a play can hardly be imagined; but Richelieu was ignorant, and self-opinionated in these things. On one occasion Corneille differed from his colleagues, and did not obey the order. The great man waxed very wroth, but had to swallow his discontent. We should much like to know the ins and outs of all that passed. There followed a battle, fought with very different weapons. Quite at the end of 1636, Corneille's tragedy, *Le Cid*, was first acted, and at once became more loudly popular than any play

before its time. Richelieu had shown that he was anxious about those plays which he had helped to manufacture, for there is reason to believe that he did not confine himself merely to giving instructions; but all his efforts failed, and he knew of the failure. It is hardly to be wondered at, that he was annoyed at Corneille's triumph. He was an ambitious man, and felt that the power of literature was gradually growing stronger. He insisted that the French Academy, which had only just come into existence, should publicly criticise the play. This was unfair towards Corneille, because he could not but be aware that the members, who had chosen him as their Protector, knew what his opinions were.

As we have said, the groundwork of the *Cid* is wholly Spanish, but the beautiful poetry of many of the lines is wholly Corneille's. And had Corneille been allowed to follow his own instincts, and write his play as his spirit moved him, it would probably be free from many of its absurdities. He was bound to observe the laws of "the three unities," which the French pedants of those days thought necessary to make incumbent upon everyone who wrote for the stage. These ignorantly learned men imagined that Aristotle on his own authority had promulgated laws to be observed in the composition of a dramatic poem, and that they should be always binding. The events in every play were to be comprised within twenty-four hours, the scene could not be changed, and in the play there should be only one interest or one line of action.

These laws were as the sword of Damocles held over the heads of the French dramatists, as they sat at their work. Richelieu had lent his voice in favour of the edict, and they dreaded being found guilty of insubordination. The authority of Aristotle was too high to be questioned; and because the Greek writers had so written, they must be followed. The great Condé expressed himself as being terribly bored by a tragedy, by the Abbé d'Aubignac. A friend of the author tried to excuse the play, saying that it was written exactly after the precepts of Aristotle. Condé replied: "I am charmed that the Abbé d'Aubignac should have followed Aristotle so carefully; but I cannot forgive Aristotle for having made the Abbé d'Aubignac write such a detestable tragedy!"

La Fontaine was surely right when he said :

N'attendez rien de bon d'un peuple imitateur,

La pire espèce, c'est l'auteur.

Corneille did not like these rules, and they had a baneful effect upon him. "The rule of the twenty-four hours," as it was called, was the most thought of; and it is generally supposed that was first put in practice in the *Sophonisbe* of Mairret, in 1629. To Mairret we owe also the comedy, *Les Galanteries du Duc d'Ossone*.

The other principal writers for the theatre, about this time, were Rotrou, Georges de Scudéry, Du Ryer, Boisrobert, Desmarets, Cyrano de Bergerac, and Thomas Corneille, born nineteen years later than his more celebrated brother. His first play was produced in 1647. Rotrou's name is honourably known, and is remembered because he died of the plague, while attending to the sick. He was the only writer of tragedy who at all approached Pierre Corneille; his best plays are *Venceslas* and *Saint Genest*. Georges de Scudéry was a voluminous writer of rubbish; a man with the manners of a *Parolles*, though with more courage. Du Ryer wrote a lot of plays, which were enjoyed by his contemporaries: *Scévole*, and *Les Vendanges de Suresne* may be chosen. Boisrobert was a factotum jester to Richelieu. It was he who first told Richelieu of the private meetings of nine or ten men of letters; from which little circle the Cardinal made the French Academy. Boisrobert was one of Richelieu's five paid authors. Though he had taken orders, he thought only of his pleasures; he led a licentious life, and was seen more frequently in the theatre than in church. Among his plays may be mentioned *La Belle Plaideuse*, *La Cassandre*, and *Les Généreux Ennemis*. Desmarets, though not one of Richelieu's five authors, was more closely connected than any of them with his literary ambition. By the Cardinal's orders he wrote plays, to which the minister contributed some verses. Desmarets's own play, *Les Visionnaires*, for which he alone was responsible, had a great success. Cyrano de Bergerac had a reputation for audacious burlesque; he wrote for the theatre only two plays, *Agrippine*, and *Le Pédant Joué*. To this latter play we owe Molière's saying: "On reprend son bien où on le trouve." For in *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, Molière had reclaimed from Cyrano his own famous: "Que diable

allait-il faire dans cette galère?" It is not generally known that this was only an act of reprisal.

It is strange, and an ungracious thing to have to say, that Pierre Corneille owes his great reputation to the *Cid*, and to the four or five subsequent plays; though, after these, he wrote eighteen others. Mr. Hawkins pleads for *Rodogune*—we are allowing it in the number—and calls it an "exquisite tragedy." After the *Cid* (1636), Corneille's three next tragedies were *Horace*, *Cinna*, and *Polyeucte*. M. Marty-Laveaux, the editor of the large edition of Corneille's works, published by Messrs. Hachette, says (Vol. III., p. 468) that all of these three plays were first performed in 1640. Then followed *Pompée*, in 1641—this is not one of the best plays—and a comedy, *Le Menteur*, in 1642. *Rodogune* was in 1644. Between this date and 1674, when Corneille wrote his last play, there was not only not one piece nearly equal to any of the first four, but there was no piece that did not detract from his former well-won glory. Parts of *Le Menteur* are charming; though to our minds even the acting of Delaunay as *Dorante*, and Got as *Cliton*, does not relieve the play of a feeling of weariness which we find frequently in Corneille. But we must remember that he has written four tragedies which Frenchmen believe will last as long as the French language.

For over thirty years Corneille had no rival as a writer of tragedies, and for eight or ten years his fame was at its zenith. It was during the early years of his success that he married. Almost immediately after his wedding he was taken so ill that it was believed he was dead. The news flew from Rouen to Paris, and verses were written in Latin deploring his loss. Happily, other verses were soon written extolling his resurrection.

People will judge of Corneille as they do other men, by their own sympathies. For our own part we are inclined, on the whole, to place *Polyeucte* as the highest of his plays. *Horace* has fine bursts of poetry, quite in Corneille's best style, and the tone of the play is ennobling. We have here the famous "Qu'il mourût," and also *Camilla's* curse pronounced on Rome as having been the cause of her lover's death. In *Polyeucte* the action is better sustained throughout, and in this play we are made acquainted with *Pauline*, certainly the most truly womanly of all Corneille's female characters. During

his own lifetime his women were spoken of, in a complimentary way, as "adorables furies"—a sort of creature that palls upon us very soon. Passionate talking and ideas of loud revenge will not alone give much charm to a reader. And though the language in which they express their thoughts be perfect of its kind, that does not really make or mar the character. Elegant writing will do very much, but it cannot make a good tragedy.

But in our eyes, Corneille's worst fault is dulness. If this be true, it is of all faults the most fatal. In a preface to one of his own plays, Voltaire tells us that every mode of writing is good, save that of the dull sort. Corneille writes too often as though he were arguing a theory of state government, or as though he were pleading a cause before a judge. Both may be perfectly admissible, but Corneille forgets that he is addressing an audience in the theatre. His theory or his argument may be the best in the world, but his audience does not want it. If a dramatist were to write a tragedy, in the second act of which a man was murdered, and the third act contained long arguments for and against the abolition of capital punishment, no single listener would thank him for his eloquence. Such was a fault into which Corneille would be likely to fall. His heroes and heroines seem too often to be working out a principle of logic or of duty, instead of letting themselves be actuated by their natural sentiments. They seem to be saying to themselves too often, "Now, what would I do if So-and-so were looking at me." On the other hand, in Corneille's plays we see many instances of the hearty and chivalrous spirit which we are taught to believe was more common among the nobles and men of distinction in those times than in later years. Under Richelieu the warlike temperament of the Ligueurs of the last century had not died out, and a good example to energy and manly spirit was set by Henri Quatre, the most popular of all French kings. Those of us who may have read Alfred de Vigny's novel, *Cinq Mars*, or Dumas's *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, will have found—some due allowance being made for romance, especially in the latter instance—pictures of the prevailing spirit of the time. And if we can read Corneille's plays with these somewhat high-flown ideas present before us, we shall perhaps put ourselves in the best position to appreciate them. He

had a high, proud, and independent nature, and he said of himself truly enough that he was under obligations to no man for any part of his success. His was, at any rate, a character that we honour and respect.

As years went on Corneille still continued to write tragedies, and they were accepted at the theatre, though with a diminishing eagerness on the part of the actors. He said, two or three times, that he meant to give up writing for the stage, but reconsidered his decision, probably from pecuniary considerations. He had two sons, whom he put into the army, and they were an expense to him. Once when he did for a time renounce the drama, he occupied himself by making a translation into verse of the *De Imitatione Christi*, and, pecuniarily, this was very satisfactory. He is reported to have been delighted with the success of his new venture. But in his last years he was a very poor man. Boileau, who piqued himself upon not taking money for his poems, used to sneer at Corneille because he demanded what was his due; but when Boileau knew in what straits his friend was, he requested that his pension, which he enjoyed as a man of letters, might be given to the aged dramatist. Pierre Corneille was not chosen a member of the French Academy until 1647, more than ten years after the *Cid* had appeared; and M. Taschereau, his biographer, tells us that his speech on the day of his reception "might certainly be quoted as one of the worst of its kind, if it did not redeem itself by the rare merit of being very short." Poor Corneille was not made for this sort of eloquence!

Molière was born in 1622, sixteen years after the birth of Corneille. His father was an upholsterer in Paris, and was one of the valets-tapisserie to the King. This appointment Molière secured in 1660, after having abandoned it to his younger brother, finding that the office would be of service to him. The family name was Poquelin, and to Jean Baptiste Poquelin, Molière added the name by which all the world now knows him. Why he chose that name is still a mystery. His father wanted him to go into his own business, but the lad wished to be educated. He was sent to the Collège de Clermont, and, under the Jesuits, made rapid progress in his studies. He went to Orleans and read philosophy under Gassendi. It is probable that he was called to the bar at Orleans in the year 1643. He came to Paris, tried to



practise at the bar, but had no success. As we have seen, Corneille also forsook the grave study of the law for the theatre. As a boy, young Poquelin had been often taken to the theatre by his maternal grandfather, and had thoroughly enjoyed all that he had seen. Now that he was to make his way in the world his heart yearned for the stage. His father was much grieved, but it was to no purpose that he used all his eloquence to dissuade him. On his return from Orleans, Poquelin spent much of his time at the theatres, and it was then that he took lessons from the Italian actor, Tiberio Fiorelli, popularly known as Scaramouche. Poquelin also became intimately acquainted with a small set of persons who, like himself, wished to set up a theatre and play before the public. In this little company there were four actors belonging to the Béjard family. They were Joseph, Louis, Madeleine, and Geneviève, all children of Joseph Béjard and Marie Hervé, his wife. It was about this time that the future poet made the change in his name. Molière very soon came to be considered the captain of the little troupe. He was held responsible for their debts, and because he could not pay them was put into prison. The company rejoiced in the name of the "Illustre Théâtre." They tried their success in Paris from 1643 to 1646, at first acting gratis, and soon afterwards demanding a money payment. But the public probably found greater theatrical attractions elsewhere. They then thought they had better try what they could do in the provinces. So they started on their wanderings in the early part of 1647. During the next eleven years or more they visited the principal towns in France. They went three times to Lyons, and there, in 1653, Molière brought out *L'Étourdi*, his first regular comedy in verse. At last, on the 3rd of November, 1658, they began to play before the public in Paris. On the 24th of October previous, Molière and his company had been allowed to give a special representation before the King, and Monsieur—the King's brother—and other members of the Court. Until 1661, the new troupe of players gave their performances in a room which, by royal favour, they shared with the Italian company then in Paris, each company playing on alternate evenings. In February, 1661, Molière's troupe went to the Palais Royal Theatre, and remained there until his death, in February, 1673. During all this time Molière was the chief manager; he

was the head man, and arbiter in all matters of dispute. And we have the satisfaction of knowing that he was honoured and respected by his comrades.

In making a short estimate of Molière's comedies, we must, of course, confine our views to their main features. We do not believe that he was endowed with imaginative powers of the first order, as was Shakespeare or Goethe, nor was his nature at all transcendental. What he saw, he saw very clearly. He felt that he was firm on his own ground. He was a man of the world, had strong and shrewd common-sense, and all manner of pretence was hateful to him. Most of his plays are satires against the humbugs of the world; and of him it may be said truly, "castigat ridendo mores." Molière had a power of throwing fun into his incidents and into the mouths of his personages, which, it is generally allowed, has not been equalled by any other writer of plays. He is rarely altogether farcical. We are inclined to agree with Boileau in condemning the dénouement of the *Fourberies de Scapin*, but we also agree with Boileau when he says that, even in the lightest of Molière's comedies, there is always something to learn. Molière was essentially a dramatist. He threw out easily what he had to say, he spoke always to the point, and he always made his dialogue subservient to the story of his play. No dialogue can run more smoothly than his, and, at the same time, every line spoken advances the action of the piece, either in telling the story or in elucidating some point of character. We think that another sign of Molière's genius is that he was able to put into the mouths of his personages such words as men and women in those positions would be likely to speak, while all his typical characters have got their own features peculiar to themselves. We therefore see distinctness and individuality of character. We may put in here a remark of Diderot's: "If anyone thinks there are many more men capable of writing *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* than *Le Misanthrope*, he is mistaken." As an actor of comedy all accounts agree in saying that he was particularly good. He took great pains with his elocution, studying beforehand how he would speak his words, convinced that he ought to leave nothing to the chance inspiration of the moment. It was said of him shortly after his death by a contemporary: "He was an actor all over from head to foot, it seemed as if he



had several voices. Everything spoke in him; and by a step, by a smile, by a wink of the eye, he made one imagine more than the greatest talker would have done in an hour." He took the principal part in nearly all his plays, and we may consider it a proof of his versatility that he should have acted such very different characters in a manner that pleased the audience. The Mascarilles, the Sganarelles, M. Jourdain, Orgon, and Alceste, were all acted by him.

The unhappy part of Molière's life was his relations with his wife. She, Armande Béjard, was the sister of those Béjards whom Molière had joined years ago when they were acting in Paris, and when they formed the troupe of the *Illustre Théâtre*. The date of her birth has not been ascertained, but as near as can be judged it took place towards the end of 1642, or early in 1643. She and Molière were married on the 20th February, 1662, she being then nineteen years old, and he forty. Armande was pretty, and her manners were fascinating. Her portrait, we are told, is traced in the ninth scene of the third act of the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. Molière was extremely fond of her, and could not restrain his affection. With a man of his loving nature it was impossible but that his home should have been very wretched. They were totally unsuited for each other. She was extravagant, was vain, and more than once unfaithful to her husband. He had tried to live apart from her, seeing her only at the theatre—for after her marriage she became one of the troupe—but no real separation took place. He was unwilling to make public the quarrel between himself and his wife, and except when he was at Auteuil, where he had taken an apartment, they both lived in the same house in Paris, he in his rooms, and she in hers. They had two sons and one daughter. The two boys died quite in their infancy. The girl, *Esprit-Madeleine*, born in 1665, lived, and in 1705, after her mother's death (in 1700), married a M. de Montalant. They had no children. Molière died on the 17th February, 1673, shortly after the fourth representation of his comedy, *La Malade Imaginaire*. During the performance he was taken ill, and with difficulty got through the part. He died of inflammation of the lungs.

One of the best trusted actors in Molière's troupe was Charles Varlet La Grange. He was the *jeune premier* of the

company, and though Molière's lovers are to us among the least interesting of his personages, La Grange was usually well received. He has another especial claim to our attention. From Molière's first appearance in Paris in the autumn of 1658, La Grange kept a daily register of what pieces were played every day by the troupe, and noted down also what were the receipts taken at the door. Other information is also given, but these two points are the most important. It is mainly with reference to Molière's own comedies that this book is valuable to us, for during the whole of the fourteen years that he was director of his theatre in Paris, he did not bring out more than fifteen new plays that were not his own. The total number of his own plays is thirty-four, though some of these he would not have written unless commanded to do so by the King. They were better adapted for gala representations before the Court than to be played on the boards of a public theatre. And it may be said also that for the performance of tragedy Molière's company were known to be inferior to their rivals at the *Hôtel de Bourgogne*. Molière, however, had the honour of bringing out the first of Racine's plays, the *Thébaïde*. This had fifteen representations. He also brought out Racine's second tragedy, *Alexandre le Grand*. And hence arose a quarrel between the two poets, in which the wrong was wholly and unmistakably on the side of Racine. His tragedy had been played at the *Palais Royal* theatre six times, and then because he thought that his play was not acted well enough, he caused it to be brought out at a rival theatre at the same time that it was being performed by the company with whom he had come to terms; and this without giving them any intimation of what he was doing. Racine's vanity as a young author was touched at what he thought was the indifferent acting of his piece—it is probable that this was in truth the case—and in his anger he was prompted by a sudden impulse, caused by his own sensitiveness, a falling which he retained to the end of his life.

Racine was born in 1639—about the same number of years after Molière as Molière had been born after Corneille—and died in 1699. When a boy he was brought up by the *Solitaires* of Port-Royal, and as far as book-learning went, he profited by this instruction; had he been able to learn their gentleness of spirit,

it had been better for him. But we do not wish now to speak evil of Racine. It may have been his fault or his misfortune that he was too touchy, too thin-skinned; we may recollect, however, that had his nature been less sensitive, his poetry would probably have lacked some of its most delicate and distinctive characteristics. Racine expresses himself always with great clearness, and his meaning may be gathered instantly from his words. When young he had all the tastes and literary perceptions of a scholar. In this he was in advance of his Port-Royalist teachers. Lancelot and Nicole were men who led a monkish life, and it was nowise their ambition to seek after elegant scholarship. They were sound grammarians, who taught earnestly and conscientiously the pupils entrusted to their care. Racine's predilection was for Greek, and those of his plays that relate to the stories in Greek mythology are generally accounted his best. Voltaire seems to give the highest praise to *Iphigénie*, but modern opinion is in favour of *Phèdre*, as being upon the whole Racine's most perfect tragedy. We recollect G. H. Lewes, a good dramatic critic, telling us that of all Racine's characters, he placed highest *Hermione* in *Andromaque*. And those who know Racine well may find that in *Athalie* the incident and conduct of the drama is better arranged than in his other tragedies. The interest here is not confined to one or two personages. We have four characters, on all of whom the weight of the piece is made to lean. If it is fortunate for Racine that we cannot easily determine which is his best tragedy, it is, perhaps, equally fortunate that we can name his worst. It is *Bérénice*. Racine wrote one comedy, *Les Plaideurs* (*The Litigants*), which he borrowed from *The Wasps* of *Aristophanes*. It is undoubtedly amusing, but the wit is not seen readily, and the piece is of a mongrel kind. The language is that of comedy, but the fun is nearly all farcical.

It is not very easy to gauge Racine's powers, and say what are the most distinctive features we see in his plays. Frenchmen say that Racine was "tendre." We must confess our inability to understand the word. Is it tender, or affectionate, or soft-hearted? We believe the word is misapplied. It has got into currency, and is therefore used. Racine had the power of putting into the mouths of his personages such

words as express their feelings very aptly; and therefore, because the object of all tragedy is to show terror and pity by the effect it produces, Racine has been called "tendre"! In England we call him "cold." That epithet is as ill-chosen as the other. A dramatist may write in verse, and yet not be a poet. We do not say this is the case with Racine, but we think his lines do not usually show the strong instinctive feeling of poetry which longs to express itself in verse. We hear that Boileau taught Racine how to write difficult verses easily—that is, to make them appear easy. If the tradition is true, the pupil profited by the instruction. It is not necessary for us now to determine why Racine chose to leave off writing for the stage. The common idea that he was converted to religion, and thought the theatre a pernicious amusement, is to us too far-fetched to be wholly credible. Religious motives, perhaps, had something to do with it, but other reasons must have operated with him. It is as difficult to determine another less important point—the cause of his disfavour at Court towards the end of his life. He did fall into disfavour, certainly, but the story has probably been somewhat exaggerated.

Louis the Fourteenth was fond of the theatre until he was forty years of age. At that time he was surfeited with pleasures, and had become blasé. For the first twenty years of his reign, he felt a pride in the men who had put a halo of glory over the country. He asked Boileau one day, who was "le plus rare" of the great writers who then honoured his reign. Boileau answered at once: "Sire, c'est Molière." The King replied: "I should not have thought so; but you are a better judge than I am." The natural instincts of Louis the Fourteenth in literary matters were not bad. They were probably not profound; but, so far as they went, he had a capability for seeing truly. It is certain that in many theatrical performances before the Court his opinion was eagerly sought after. His judgment was generally better than that of his courtiers, and more than once, after they had expressed their disapproval of a play, they changed their minds because the monarch, who had been slow to say what he thought, had thought well of it. Such was the case with Racine's comedy, *Les Plaideurs*, and with Molière's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. Without the protection of Louis the Fourteenth, Molière's

Tartuffe might never have been allowed on the stage during its author's lifetime.

We have said nothing of the minor French dramatists of the seventeenth century, for we have thought it better to keep to the main high-road and confine our few remarks to well-known names. Had we gone into the bye-ways and spoken of the theatre as illustrated by the second-class writers, the subject, taken altogether, would have been too large in the space at our disposal either to write about or to be read with satisfaction.

From the commencement of the *Comédie Française*, in 1680, to the year 1700, we find that on the public theatre in Paris—it will be recollected that there was then only one theatre—of Corneille's plays there were altogether nine hundred and one representations; of Molière's, two thousand three hundred and fifty; and of Racine's, seven hundred and fifty-six. Corneille's *Cid* was his only play performed more than one hundred times; Molière's *Tartuffe* was his highest—one hundred and eighty-one; then his *Misanthrope*, one hundred and fifty. Racine's comedy, *Les Plaideurs*, was his highest—one hundred and twenty-eight; then his *Phèdre*, one hundred and fourteen; then *Andromaque*, one hundred and eleven. Before the Court, Molière had altogether one hundred and ninety-three representations during that period; Corneille, one hundred and twenty-seven; and Racine, one hundred and twenty-three. We must recollect, however, as between Corneille and Racine, that nineteen plays of the older author are represented, but only ten of his later rival; the advantage, therefore, would seem to be in Racine's favour.

Here our incomplete sketch of a most interesting period must come to an end. All who are interested in the old French stage will do well to study the subject in Mr. Hawkins's volumes, which are as amusing as they are painstaking and accurate—and that is high praise.

#### LAUREL.

A PICTURED face, in frame of gold,  
Large, tender eyes, and forehead bold,  
And firm, unflinching mouth;  
A face that tells of mingled birth—  
The calmness of the northern earth,  
The passion of the south!

The one face in the world to me,  
The face I never more shall see  
Until God's kingdom come!  
Oh, tender eyes! oh, firm strong lips!  
What comfort in my life's eclipse?  
What succour? Ye are dumb!

I brought the blossoms of the spring  
To deck my true love's offering,  
While he was far away:  
With rose's bloom, with pansy's grace,  
I wreathed the well-beloved face;  
I have no flowers to-day.

But laurel, laurel for my brave,  
My hero lying in his grave  
Upon that foreign sod!  
He passed amid the crash of guns,  
Beyond the farthest sun of suns,  
A kingly soul, to God!

He died upon the battle-field,  
He knew not, he, to fly nor yield,  
Bold Britain's worthy son!  
And I will wreath the laurel crown,  
Although the bitter tears run down—  
I was his chosen one.

He loved his country, so did I;  
He parted forth to do or die,  
And I—I let him go;  
Oh dear, dear land! we gave thee all,  
God bless the banner, and the pall,  
God help the mourner's woe!

I hear the bells ring loud and sweet,  
I hear the shouting in the street,  
For joy of victory;  
The very children cease their play,  
To babble of the victor's bay,  
And pennons flutter free.

I hear the vivas long and loud,  
As they ride onward through the crowd,  
His comrades bold and brave;  
The shouts of triumph rend the air,  
Oh, he must hear them lying there,  
My hero in his grave!

I do not grudge thee, darling mine!  
I, the last daughter of a line  
Whose warrior blood ran free  
Upon the battle-fields of old;  
Thou wast not mine to have and hold,  
The land had need of thee.

I do not grudge thee; I shall smile  
Belovéd, in a little while,  
And glory in thy name;  
I hold love's laurel in my hand,  
But take thou from the grateful land  
Thy wreath of deathless fame!

#### ON THE ROAD.

IN spite of the necessary decadence of the road as a means of communication for business-folk since the introduction of railways, there are still many more people who may be said to live by it, and on it, than dwellers in great towns can believe. In every community there is a certain proportion of beings "restless, unfixed in principles and place," to whom the notion of remaining bound down to one given spot for any length of time is not only abhorrent, but intolerable. Many of them follow callings which are eminently respectable, if by the epithet "respectable" we are to understand honesty, sobriety, and industry. On the other hand, there are many who are simply pariahs of society—men who have long since cut adrift all

ties binding them to home and relations; whose hands are against every man's, and against whom are the hands of every man; whose lives are unsavoury romances; whose existences are essentially bound up with the present, without a care or a thought for the future.

The railway robbed the road of what may be called its aristocratic professionals—the commercial travellers, the coach-drivers, and guards, and, we must unwillingly add, the highwaymen, although the latter were, in spite of their swagger and show, but sorry cowards who ran no risks, worked only with the odds in their favour, and whose highest accomplishment was the development of their faculty for running away; but it is strange to find so many hundreds of their humbler brethren still running, or rather walking, in the old grooves of life, still preserving old idiosyncrasies, as if the road were yet a power in the land. Of the aristocrats, indeed, the "commercial" alone exists in any shape, on or off the road. Very few bagmen now use the road in proportion to the old numbers, and with the changed character of the age, the character of the bagman has changed. As a man he is a very superior being to his predecessor, but business competition nowadays is so keen that he has no time to be anything but a man of business, and the old dashing, bibulous, practical-joking commercial is as extinct as the *Iguanodon*. Pleasure enters very little into the daily routine of his life; he must live well in order to secure the special privileges and accommodation afforded him at hotels, and to sustain him in the exceedingly arduous nature of his calling; but the old fun and camaraderie of the profession has disappeared with the old fun and camaraderie of the road. The commercial-room of the present day might be a merchant's office, except during the dinner-hour. The gentlemen dine, and honour the time-hallowed toasts; but, the repast ended, there is a rush for the writing-tables, and nothing but the sound of scratching pens is to be heard. Trains are not snowed-up, or railway-lines made useless, as coaches and roads frequently were in the old days, so that not even by accident does the modern "com." often get a chance of acting up to the traditions of his calling by spending a jovial evening.

The modern professionals of the road belong rather to the amusement-catering callings than to those connected with

serious business; and even of the latter, many make little more than a show in order to avoid the sweeping local edicts concerning "vagrom-men."

Circuses, from their peculiar character, generally travel by road, and we imagine that a volume written, say by Mr. Sanger, would be a vast deal more amusing and instructive than many books ostentatiously published for amusement and instruction. The apparition of one of these vast travelling caravanserais in a remote country road is full of suggestiveness to the imaginative mind, especially if it be seen from some distance. The weird appearance of camels and elephants stalking along amidst green trees, almost makes us fancy for the moment that we are in that England when, if we are to believe a certain school of scientists, the climate was tropical, and of which the denizens of the African jungle and desert were prolific inhabitants. The gorgeous cars seen from a distance might be twisted into the likeness of one of those imposing processions by which the artful old abbots and Church dignitaries imposed so easily upon the minds of simple country-folk. The illusion, of course, is destroyed directly we come face to face with the African lion-tamer, clad in a suit of corduroys, and smoking a clay-pipe, and when we hear a few sentences proceed from the mouth of the Empress of the Golden Isles; but it is sufficiently imposing from a distance.

Acrobats, Punch and Judy men, German bands, and organ-grinders traverse the great roads of our country districts to an enormous extent, as anyone knows who is much in the habit of exploring them. To anyone accustomed to the ordinary comforts and luxuries of life, such an existence in all weathers and under all circumstances appears intolerable. Yet it may be noted that, so far from being a jaded, downcast crew, these road-professionals are as jolly and contented as was Chaucer's famous company of pilgrims. Their expenses are little or nothing; they are completely their own masters; a strict bond of freemasonry exists amongst them; they have their own houses of call; their routes are mapped out with method, certain places being visited at certain times—these times being nicely calculated so that the journey may be rewarded with success. The gradual disappearance of the old English pleasure-fair has taken a great deal of bread out of the mouths of these folk, and the market-days of country towns are



but poor substitutes. The dates of country fairs were as accurately known amongst the travelling professions as are the dates of birthdays in families, and it may be imagined that no little care was necessary in the preparation of the year's campaign to ensure attendance at as many of these festivals as possible. We may wonder, when we see these men at such fairs as remain, where they come from; but if we were to question one of them, we should discover him to be a complete walking almanack of such events in every part of the country.

In spite of the wondrous changes which have passed over our country during the last half-century, the pedlar of old days still flourishes, and Autolycus is by no means an extinct being. He may still be seen progressing slowly along the cottage rows of village streets, calling at house after house with his oilskin-cased basket containing the very same collection of worthless gew-gaws which have been the peculiar stock-in-trade of pedlars from all time.

He is still regarded as an oracle and newsman, for, although villages nowadays mostly have their clubs and reading-rooms, there are many people who never see a newspaper, who would not be interested by it if they did see it, and who are far more ready to hear the last piece of gossip or scandal from the next village than the most startling piece of news from the greater world without. He is often a rogue, but he is a capital road-companion, inasmuch as it is as much his business to keep himself au courant with what is going on, as it is to sell cheap jewellery and fancy ribbons; and, as the success of his calling depends to no small extent upon his command of the "gift of the gab," he is never dull company.

Another very flourishing professional wanderer is the gatherer of simples, or, as he calls himself, the herbalist. The conservatism of our country folk, in the matter of medicine, comprises, it may be said, almost all their conservatism. They are beginning to regard ghosts and bogles as stuff and nonsense; they have learnt to be moderate in their estimation of the Londoner, regarding him as neither a very marvellous nor a very terrible being; they have forgotten their old customs to a very great extent, and their old songs entirely; but to a wonderful extent they believe in the efficacy of the remedies handed down almost unchanged from the

days when the monks were the sole depositaries of medical and surgical knowledge. Our simple-gatherer is, therefore, a sort of doctor in his way. He believes firmly that apoplexy, paralysis, gout, and rheumatism are to be alienated by use of wall-flowers; that the Canterbury-bell or throte wort is good for swellings and inflammations of the throat; that golden rod stops blood-flow; that Jesuit's bark cures ague; that the "golden water," made from lilies-of-the-valley, is good to strengthen the limbs of children; that red valerian, peony, and columbine are invaluable—peony in especial hastening the growth of children's teeth, its dried roots being tied round their necks.

He can tell us all about the carminative hot and cold seeds, the opening roots, the emollient herbs, the capillary herbs, the sudorific woods, the cordial flowers, the vast list of flowers and roots which cure diseases of corresponding form—such as nettle-tea for nettle-rash, worm root for lunacy, liver wort for liver complaints, saffron-flowers for scarlet-fever. He works hard, early and late; for his occupation necessitates a good deal of trespassing. Long before the woodman has shouldered his axe, and started for the copses, the gatherer of simples may be seen creeping along the banks of sedgy streams, or kneedeep in the grass and flowers of pleasant fields, or groping along hedgerows, or pushing his way through thick undergrowth, always in a shamefaced sort of way; for his chief enemy, the keeper, cannot be persuaded that a man carrying a stout stick and a basket is not after rabbits or any other marketable creature that comes handy.

Strange to say, most of these wanderers hail from the great metropolis. We have met them in the most unlikely places, at the most out-of-the-way spots. A German bandsman has importuned us for a contribution under the very shadow of the great gateway of the once famous house of Our Lady of Walsingham. He and his companions, scarcely able to express themselves in English, had been on the tramp over East Anglia for a month, and were then going due West. We have heard the unmistakable accent of an East London pedlar within a stone's throw of Hadrian's Wall, at a once famous inn known as The Twice Brewed, standing on the military road between Carlisle and Newcastle. We have met Punch and Judy crossing that wild expanse of fell country which lies

between Allendale town and Alston in Cumberland, the box in which Punch and Company travelled being a Bermondsey haddock-case. We have heard a music-hall ditty, which three weeks before was being howled and whistled by every London gamin, shouted forth in the quiet street of a Dartmoor village by a gentleman who must have been a lineal descendant of the travelling chapmen and ballad-mongers of old time, such a curious sheaf of old ditties had he under his arm. But the retailer of ballads is a rare object nowadays. Music is a cheap and frequent taste, and the village youths who used to pass their leisure time in ringing grandsire bobs and triple-majors in the church steeple, are now drilled into the execution of glees and madrigals by the parson and his lady folk.

The professional tramp is an entirely distinct being from any road wanderers hitherto named. From his title one would imagine that he amongst all of them would be the greatest traveller. Such, however, is not the case. Miserable wretch as he looks, he has a very keen eye to personal convenience and comfort, and it may be noted that he is rarely to be met with in outlandish counties, or very far from a main road. He bears, in fact, the same relation to other knights of the road that the captain of a coasting vessel bears to the merchant skipper, who wanders all over the globe, and who does not know until he arrives at a port where next he may go. As a rule, he confines himself to certain districts lying between certain "houses"—i.e., unions, with the character of which he is thoroughly well acquainted. He is always on the tramp, but although in his peculiar limping mode of progression he covers more miles of road in a day than his personal appearance would warrant us in believing him capable of performing, he sees a very small circle of country in proportion to the time he occupies "on business." As often as not he confines himself to a certain country or a certain round of parishes; the spirit of adventure and exploration is not strong within him, and he very much prefers monotony with certain results, to variety with uncertainty. The same custom is apparent amongst those itinerant vendors of basket-work and cheap hardware, who are generically known as "gipsies," although in nine cases out of ten they have not a drop of true Romany blood in their veins, and whose wheeled houses are such objects of envy and mystery to the youthful mind. They confine their

movements to certain roads, which they traverse at certain seasons, and may be observed to pass particular places at almost mathematically regular intervals. We once came across a basket-cart belonging to John Wild, of Marden, Kent, in the midst of Salisbury Plain, but it was an exceptional occurrence, probably arising from the fact that John Wild had been infringing the eighth commandment somewhere in his usual district, and was travelling "abroad" from motives of personal convenience.

One question to which we have never had an entirely satisfactory answer is, What becomes of all these nomad folk during the long months of winter? Some of them, we can understand, amalgamate themselves with the population of great cities, and follow other callings; some, we can readily believe, get boarded and lodged at the public expense in unions, prisons, and even in regiments, whence they emerge with the first burst of vernal weather. At any rate, from the middle of November to the beginning of April they are conspicuous by their absence from the roads, and the curious explorer who would select that period of the year for a study of our English road-professionals might be pardoned for believing that the race became extinct with the old glory of the road itself.

#### ODD STORIES ABOUT RINGS.

THE late Colonel G. Paulett Cameron, C.B., possessed a singularly curious ring, called the "Tiger's Claw," to which was attached an episode of a sanguinary character, related by the historians of India.

About the year 1650, Sevajee founded the Mahratta monarchy, which, subsequently, was destined to become one of the most powerful that arose on the ruins of the Mogul empire. At the period of its first uprising, it was of the highest importance for Sevajee to gain possession of the rich and renowned city of Beeja, which, at that period, was said by Eastern writers to be thirty miles in circumference. Finding he was not strong enough to take it by force, he sought an interview with the Mogul governor, Afzool Khan. It was agreed, to defeat treachery, that each should be attended by only a single follower. At the appointed time Sevajee prepared himself for what he considered a holy work

by the ceremonies of religion, and the solace of maternal approbation. He performed his ablutions with peculiar care, and prostrating himself at his mother's feet, he besought her blessing. Thus morally armed for the conflict, he did not, however, neglect to provide himself with the more substantial requisites of success and safety. To appearance, his covering was only a turban and a cotton gown, but beneath he wore a steel-chain cap, and steel armour. Within his right sleeve he placed a crooked dagger, called in the language of the country a scorpion, and on the fingers of his left-hand, a treacherous weapon called a "tiger's claw," which consists of three crooked blades of small dimensions; the whole being easily concealed in a half-closed hand. Thus accoutred, he advanced to the place of meeting. The Khan had arrived before him, and Sevajee, as he approached, frequently stopped as though under the influence of alarm. To assure him, the armed attendant of the Mahometan general removed a few paces distant from his master, and the latter approaching Sevajee, the conference commenced by the ordinary ceremonial of an embrace. The Mahratta prepared to make the most of his opportunity, and struck the tiger's claw into the body of the Khan, following the blow by another from his dagger. The Khan drew his sword, and made a cut at the assassin, but it fell harmless on the concealed armour. Sevajee's follower rushed to his support, and a preconcerted signal being given, a body of troops attacked those of his adversary, who had been stationed at a little distance, and who, being unprepared for such an attack, found themselves exposed to an enemy before they could stand to their arms. The victory enriched Sevajee with a vast amount of plunder; but this was little compared with the accession of reputation which he owed to it; the perpetration of successful treachery being, in Mahratta estimation, the highest exercise of human genius.

Outwardly the tiger-ring appears like two rings of plain coloured stones on different fingers, but these are connected inwardly by the formidable weapon mentioned.

In a work on Finger-ring Lore published a few years ago, some instances are given of lost rings recovered from fishes. The following might have been added. The facts are related by Sir E. Alexander, in his *Salmon-fishing in Canada*:

"Seven o'clock came, and William Massey, having handed his bride-elect to the table, sat at the head of the hospitable board, around which were assembled twenty people, and proceeded to carve the salmon, which we had so recently killed. On placing the fish-knife near the gills to take off the first-cut of the head, it grated on some unyielding substance, which prevented his making the proper incision in the fish, whereupon he took a fork and drew out from a bed which it had formed for itself, beneath the gills, a solid gold finger-ring, with the word 'pure' stamped on the inside of it. It was handed about as a curiosity, and the whisper at table was that it was one of the rings of the former Mrs. Massey, who, with her footman and two boatmen had been lost in a fog, while crossing the Shannon, near the spot where the salmon in question had been caught, but this her husband denied aloud, and eventually his sister, the Hon. Mrs. Drew, took possession of it."

Mr. John H. Van Lennep, in *Notes and Queries*, relates that some years before the drainage of the Haarlemmermeir, a lake which, for its extension, almost merited the name of a sweet-water sea, Mr. Van Notten, a gentleman living at Amsterdam, happened to be one of a party on a fishing excursion on that lake, then justly renowned for its beautiful perch. By some accident, Mr. Van Notten chanced to drop his ring into the water, and naturally considered it lost for ever. Several years had elapsed, and the drainage of the lake was proceeding fast, when Mr. Van Notten was apprised that a ring had been found in the reclaimed grounds. Though very doubtful as to the possibility of its being his lost property, he thought some enquiry might be made, and before leaving home he provided himself with an impression of his arms in sealing-wax to prove the identity of the seal. Scarcely had he presented this proof to the gentleman in whose keeping the ring was, before he heard the welcome reply, "Sir, I do not want any further proof; there is the ring—it is your own."

The ring of invisibility, such as Gyges is said to have worn, occupied a large share of popular superstition in early times. In a curious and rare work, entitled, *The Majick of Kirani, King of Percia*, and of Harpocraton—printed in the year 1685—is a curious receipt for making this charmed ring. "Dissolve the eyes of a quail, or of the sea-tench, with a little water in a glass



vessel for seven days, then add a little oyle ; put a little of this into the candle, or only anoynt a rag, and light among the company, and they will look upon themselves as devils on fire, so that every one will run his way. In the sardonix stone, engrave a quail, and under its feet a sea-tench, and put a little of the said confection under the stone in the hollow of the ring, and when you are unwilling to be seen, anoint your face all over with the aforesaid confection, and wear the ring, and no man shall see you if you do anything in the house ; no, not if you should take anything away that is in the house."

It is remarkable that the story of Gyges comes up again in the Welsh romance of *Morte d'Arthur*. One is there said to have a ring which possessed the virtue of rendering the wearer invisible, and which, with Guendolen's chess-board, was reckoned among the thirteen wonders of Britain. In the *Mabinogion*, stones conferring invisibility are frequently mentioned, usually in the favourite form of a gem set in a ring. "Take this ring," said the damsel with yellow curling hair, "and put it on thy finger with the stone inside thy hand, and close thy hand upon the stone, and so long as thou concealest it, it will conceal thee."

The stone of invisibility was formerly kept at Caerleon, in Monmouthshire, the city whence St. David journeyed into Pembrokeshire. It is mentioned in the *Triads* thus : "The stone of the King of Luned, which liberated Owen, the son of Urien, from between the portcullis and the wall ; whoever concealed that stone, or bezel, would conceal him." The "Stone of Remembrance," also alluded to in the *Mabinogion*, was a jewel endowed with invaluable properties, which it imparted, not only to its wearer, but to anyone who looked upon it. "Ronabury," says Iddawe to the enchanted dreamer on the yellow calf-skin, "dost thou see the ring, with a stone set in it, that is upon the Emperor's hand ?" "I see it," he answered ; "it is one of the properties of that stone to enable thee to remember that thou seest here to-night, and hadst thou not seen the stone, thou would'st never have been able to remember aught thereof."

Montaigne, in one of his essays, alludes to the Platonic ring, that renders the wearer invisible, turned inward towards the palm of the hand, and adds, "If such were common, a great many would often hide themselves when they ought most to appear."

The ring of invisibility which belonged to Otnef, King of Lombardy, given to him by the Queen-mother when he went to gain in marriage the Soldan's daughter, had, among other virtues, the very useful one of directing the wearer the right road to take in travelling.

The fish and the ring, however, is one of the oldest traditions we have. In the Talmud fables, the prodigy of Solomon's ring is duly related, and ancient writers have enlarged upon the same theme. "Here in Hippo," says Augustine, "there was a poor and holy old man, by name Florentius, who obtained a living by tailoring. This man once lost his coat, and, not being able to purchase another to replace it, he came to the shrine of the Twenty Martyrs in this city, and prayed aloud to them, beseeching that they would enable him to get another garment. A number of silly boys, who overheard him, followed him on his departure, scoffing at him, and asking him whether he had begged fifty pence from the martyrs to buy a coat. The poor man went on silently towards home, and, as he passed near the sea, he saw a large fish which had been cast upon the sand, and was still panting. The other persons who were present allowed him to take up the fish, which he brought to one Catosus, a cook, and a good Christian, who bought it of him for three hundred pence. With this he meant to purchase wool, which his wife might spin, and make into a garment for him. When the cook cut up the fish, he found within its belly a ring of gold, which his conscience persuaded him to give to the poor man from whom he bought the fish. He did so, saying at the same time, "Behold how the Twenty Martyrs have clothed you !"

Many stories have been related of the recognition of persons by a ring. The following instance has been recorded by De Thou and other French historians. In 1562, Rouen was besieged by the Protestants, and the governor of the city, Montgomery, having observed the dauntless bravery of an officer under his command, François de Cville, entrusted him with the defence of a fortified gate. While thus engaged, he was shot through the head by an arquebusier, and rendered insensible. Falling from the rampart, and considered dead, he was thrown into a ditch, and some earth was lightly thrown over him. He lay thus from ten in the morning until six in the evening. His faithful servant,



named Barré, hearing of the sad fate of his master, obtained permission to search for the body, and have it buried. All his care seemed fruitless, for the body was disfigured and covered with mud. He was about to return disconsolate, when he observed, by the light of the moon, something shining brilliantly, and, stooping down, he found it proceeded from a diamond which his master wore in a ring. On touching the finger, he fancied there was some warmth in it, and he conveyed the body tenderly to the garrison, where the body was examined and pronounced lifeless. The servant, however, was not satisfied with this opinion, and remained watching his master, until, after four days of insensibility, Civile regained his senses and was restored to consciousness. This remarkable man, who was born in 1537, and died in 1614, was the hero of numberless adventures and critical escapes. D'Aubigné, the historian, relates: "I saw him at the national assemblies, a deputy from Normandy, forty-two years after his wound, and I observed that when we signed our depositions, he always added: 'François de Civile, three times dead, three times buried, and three times, by God's grace, restored to life.'"

Recognition by means of a ring is pleasingly rendered in a tale of Italian Tirols, one of which is called *Zendrarola*, equivalent to our *Cinderella*, of which, with a few variations, it is a counterpart. The heroine, in love with a young Count, obtains the place of kitchen-maid in his palace; but goes to a ball richly dressed, where the Count, not knowing her thus changed, falls in love with her. He gives her a ring, which, in her renewed capacity of cook, she sends up in his broth, as *Klein-Else*, in a nearly similar story in *The North Tirolean Folk-lore*, does in a pancake. The count recognises the ring and marries her.

In one or two versions of the Roman story, the means of recognition is a ring, instead of a slipper.

A story of a ring being the price of a kiss is related in the Icelandic *Kormak's Saga*, showing in what light the fair sex was regarded there in ancient times. Allusion is made to a duel in which Thorvard, as the wounded person, is obliged to give his antagonist a gold ring, equivalent to the legal fine of three marks. In another duel with Kormak, in a love-affair, he is again overcome, and is obliged to give another gold ring, and finds that duelling

is not only dangerous, but it is also an expensive amusement. Kormak, before setting sail for Norway, pays a visit to the Lady Keingarda, for whom he had battled, and he gives her two kisses. Thorvard declares that he must pay the legal fine for his audacity.

"What do ye demand?" asks Kormak.

"The two rings," replies Thorvard, "which I had to give thee, by virtue of the Holmgang regulations"—a penalty exacted for this breach of good manners.

"Be it so," said Kormak, giving him the two rings, and extemporising a strophe, which runs somewhat as follows:

For two kisses impress'd,  
With glowing desire  
On a woman's sweet lips,  
Two gold rings ye require.  
The gems shall be yours,  
Though methinks 'tis not meet  
To tax a poor wight  
For so luscious a treat.

Mr. Shaw, in his *Visits to High Tartary, Yarkand, and Kashgar*, gives an instance of the efficacy of a seal-ring in reducing an elephant to obedience. "The King of Bokhâra marched to Khokand and established his protégé, Koodah Yâr. The Khokandees were much struck by two elephants which he brought with him. These are the envy of all other Central Asian potentates. It was gravely related to me that one of these elephants having got loose, set off on the road to Bokhâra. Attempts were made, but vainly, to stop him. The servants reported the matter to their master. The Ameer took off his signet-ring, the symbol of his authority, and dispatched it by the hands of a courier on horseback, saying, 'When you have overtaken the elephant, put it before him, and in my name, and tell him to return to Khokand.' The man did so, whereupon the elephant paused, turned round, and slowly returned to the city."

The salutary virtues of a ring, independent of the enchantments and occult powers grafted on it in olden times, are strikingly exemplified in the following anecdote. In the *Histoires et Parables* of Father Bonaventure Girardeau (edit. 1813), is the story of a rich man, whose remorse for an ill-spent life led him to Rome to beseech the Pope to convert him. The Pope suggested various penances that he should undergo, but none seemed to meet his case; fasting was detrimental to his health; he had no time to read or pray; to undertake a pilgrimage would interrupt his worldly affairs—in fact, to every recom-

commendation of the Pope he had some excuse for not carrying it out. The Pope heard the penitent patiently, and, on his leaving, gave him a gold ring, on which was the inscription, "Memento mori" (Remember you must die), and told him that he should always wear the ring, and read the inscription at least once a day.

The rich man retired, congratulating himself on having so light a task imposed upon him, but, in a short time, the words fell deeper and deeper on his mind, and he said to himself: "As I must die, what else have I in the world to prepare myself for it? Why regard my health that death must destroy, or think of riches that will pass away?" The conclusion of these thoughts led to his pursuing a life of rigorous self-denial, and doing worthy actions, which made him beloved by all to his dying day.

In one of Hawthorne's American notes, he relates a singular incident that befell his friend, Dr. Harris, while a junior at college. Being in want of money to purchase shirts, and other necessities, and not knowing how to obtain it, he set out on a walk from Cambridge to Boston. On the way he cut a stick, and after walking a short distance perceived that something had become attached to the end of it. This proved to be a gold ring, bearing the motto, "God speed thee, friend!" an encouragement to persevere in his efforts for improvement, and a salutary assistance to him.

Rings, as we know, in former times, were sometimes officially used in the conveyance of property, and were legally recognised as part and parcel of such transfers. In the eighteenth year of Queen Elizabeth's reign, Sir Francis Englefield settled his manor and estate at Englefield, in Berkshire, on Francis, his nephew, with power, notwithstanding, of revoking his grant "if he, during his natural life, should deliver or tender to his nephew a gold ring." "With intent," says Burke, "to make void the uses of his said settlement; various disputes and points of law arose (the manors, lands, and vast possessions having been forfeited to the Queen in the twenty-eighth year of her reign) whether the said manor and estate of Englefield were forfeited to the Queen." In order to settle the dispute off-hand, Elizabeth, in the ensuing session, had a special Act passed, establishing the forfeiture of Englefield to herself, her heirs and assigns, and, backed by the

enactment, she came upon the scene, tendered a gold ring to Sir Francis, and seized and confiscated the said manor and estate, and many other possessions.

By the ingenious, if not cunning, device by which Queen Elizabeth confiscated the estates of the Englefields, this ancient family was stripped of an inheritance on which they had flourished for seven hundred and eighty years.

The Queen's love for jewellery was unbounded, and her wily courtiers availed themselves of this passion by giving her numerous jewels as New Year presents; but among the costly rings in which she took especial delight, none could bring her such good fortune (however equivocally employed) as the gold ring that turned the fortunes of the Englefields.

## LADY LOVELACE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "JUDITH WYNNE," ETC., ETC.

### CHAPTER XXXV.

THE preservation of Uncle Hugh's serenity of temper was a task Ellinor detested, and yet one which from time to time she found herself compelled to take in hand. If only she could have kept a third maid to perform the tiresome office she would have been quite willing to have assigned to her one of the slippers she herself was waiting to step into—in other words, have shared with her the handsome fortune she was expecting to accrue to her when Uncle Hugh died. Fatigue of heart she shunned as much as she did fatigue of body. The economy of the emotions was an art in which she was an adept.

"Why should I," she had exclaimed to Lucy as she detailed to her another gusty interview with the old gentleman, "be compelled to smile and say pleasant things, when I have no wish to say anything at all?"

And Lucy's answer, an answer now that was beginning to be a sort of refrain to the duets these two sang together, had been:

"Oh, my darling, I wish I could do this for you—give your smiles as well as your tears when they are a task to you."

Uncle Hugh was, for him, in a singularly tempestuous frame of mind just then. Like his beautiful niece, he did not care to spend his soul over the small worries and anxieties of existence. To his way of thinking a gentleman should have the affairs of life made smooth and ready to his hand just

as he had his dogs trained and his guns loaded for him. He was willing enough that this, his favourite niece, should have her whims and wishes humoured to their fullest extent, always provided they were whims and wishes that did not run counter to his own, and for which he could experience a fair amount of sympathy. But somehow of late these two conditions did not appear to be fulfilled, a catastrophe, no doubt, for which Providence in part was to blame, in part Ellinor herself. Providence, for example, must be held responsible for Juliet's ill-health, the breaking-up of Mrs. Yorke's London home, and for the consequent unpleasant necessity of providing suitable quarters for Ellinor during the winter season; but Providence could in no sense be held to blame for the young lady's discontent with her suitable quarters when they had been found for her, nor for the whimsicalness of her conduct in taking flight from them, and establishing herself, as she had, in quarters that were not so suitable, and with which unsuitability she, moreover, appeared entirely content.

"What you can find to do here morning, noon, and night, with Sir Peter and his wife always upstairs in armchairs, or driving about the town looking after new doctors, is more than I can imagine," he said, walking up and down the room with his thumbs in his waistcoat, and having visions meanwhile of a number of young men making themselves free of the house, and there being "the mischief to pay" afterwards.

"We eat, we drink, we sleep, we go out driving, occasionally we walk. I suppose we should do all these things whether Sir Peter and Lady Moulsey were upstairs or down," answered Ellinor composedly.

By a coincidence this interview with Uncle Hugh took place on the self-same morning that Phil had a few questions put to him by Colonel Wickham.

"Do you get any visitors? That's what I want to know," asked Uncle Hugh, stopping in front of her chair, and looking full at her. "Any confounded young fools who don't know how to get rid of their time, and so come in here to make asses of themselves?"

Uncle Hugh had a large head—a distinctly pleasure-loving, money-spending head—but in stature he was somewhat dumpy. Nevertheless, as he said this, his neck elongated and his figure seemed to extend itself till one would have credited

him with at least five feet ten inches of bone and muscle.

"Several of my mother's old friends have been to see me—a Bishop of somewhere or other and his wife; a Sir Joseph Someone—I've forgotten his name—and his wife. I think he has something to do with the Post Office, or the Bank of England, or the British Museum—I'm not sure which. I don't know whether they belong to the class you name."

Uncle Hugh turned on his heel, and began walking up and down the room again.

Ellinor's coolness and self-possession under the fire of his crisp, blustering interrogatories always smoothed down his ill-humour. If she had snapped at him, or grown nervous and ill at ease under his cross-questioning, the chances were he would have cut her off with a shilling.

He came back from the other end of the long room with a calmer question:

"Now, Nell, you know perfectly well what I mean. Are there any of those lank-haired young idiots who call themselves poets, or any of those infernal painters, dangling about the house? You know there were whispers about you and young Thorne—that fool who didn't know how to handle a pistol—a little while ago. Of course there was not a word of truth in the reports—I know that—and no one with any sense in his head believed them; but still I do not choose that such whispers should be set going—do you hear? I won't have you talked about in that way!"

Ellinor winced a little, but did not show it.

"Mr. Effingham has been here exactly three times to paint me as Gyneth, but I wrote to him last night, and told him he must not come again, as you did not approve of my giving sittings to such youthful members of his profession," she answered quietly.

"You did!"

"Yes; I told him you had a strong antipathy to all painters, especially young ones, and begged him to keep clear of the house for the future."

Uncle Hugh smiled a grim smile.

"That's about the most sensible thing you've ever done in your life, Nell; you've saved me the trouble of speaking my mind to him," he said approvingly. "Now what I want to know is when you're going to join your mother. I'm convinced that's the best thing you can do now. Sir Peter

and his wife will light among their many doctors on a man who'll suddenly start them off for one of the Hesses or the 'Bads—confounded humbugs the whole lot are!—and I shall have you thrown on my hands again!"

He broke off for a moment, then added with an energy that left no room for doubt as to the sincerity of the wish:

"I wish to Heaven, Ellinor, you would make haste and bring off that fine match you're always talking about!"

"My dear uncle, if ever I'm to make a fine match I must have someone to do the active and aggressive part of the arrangement for me. You don't expect me to go out of my way to lay traps and snares for men. It wouldn't suit me!"

Uncle Hugh chuckled:

"It seems to me, without going very much out of your way, you contrive to do a fair amount of execution. But who, may I ask, young lady, do you expect to do the active and aggressive part for you? Not me, I hope, at my time of life."

Ellinor's reply was the languidly-put question:

"Have you seen Lord Winterdowne lately? Will he be in town before Easter, do you think?"

Uncle Hugh gave a long, low whistle.

"Oh, that's it, is it? The wind sits in that quarter. My dear niece, I have seen Lord Winterdowne no later than yesterday, when he was in town, presiding at a meeting of 'ologists of some sort, and there is not the least possibility of his being in town this side of Easter. So, while you are waiting for that desirable event, the best thing you can do is to pack up your boxes and set off for the Riviera, in company with that little girl you've taken such a violent fancy for."

He was a dogged old man this Uncle Hugh, and went back terrier-like to his fads, like a dog to his bone.

Ellinor felt she must get this bone from between his teeth, though her fingers got bitten in the process.

"I'm not fit for a long journey just now," she said, with ever such a slight frown; "my cold has pulled me down a good deal, and the sight of Juliet and her many ailments would be sure to bring me still lower."

"Why, in Heaven's name, don't you go to a doctor, if you feel as bad as all that?" ejaculated the old gentleman irritably, yet with some real feeling below the irritability, for he could not forget how that his

mother and two brothers had died of that self-same disease which had now Ellinor's sister in its fell grasp.

"Oh, I'm going, Uncle Hugh—I'm always going; but you know how I hate doctors—how the very sight of them sets me shivering and thinking of churchyards and all that——"

But Uncle Hugh interrupted her.

"Look here, Nell! it's just this: if you don't find a doctor for yourself, I shall do it for you, and see if there really is anything ailing you, or if it's only one of your fancies. Why, medical registers must abound in this house. I should say the whole literature of the family consisted in them——"

"And in spectacle-makers' and aurists' catalogues," finished Ellinor. "Very well, Uncle Hugh, since you so particularly wish it, I'll find my way into a medical consulting-room one day next week, and let you know the result." And as she said this, the thought in her own mind was: "And he'll be the oddest doctor I shall ever have come across, if he doesn't lay it down as a necessity for my continued existence that I must remain in London right on till the end of the season."

Uncle Hugh went away mollified, leaving behind him his signature to a considerable amount.

Ellinor tossed the cheque over to Gretchen, and then fell to considering her plans—her ways and means for procuring success to her wishes.

It was all nonsense what Uncle Hugh had said about Lord Winterdowne, it had been said simply to throw her off the track, she said to herself; to her certain knowledge he would be in London presiding at scientific meetings (there were the advertisements in the papers), three times within the next ten days. Well, each of those three times Uncle Hugh must secure him either for luncheon before the meetings or for dinner afterwards, and for the play after that.

All that could be easily arranged, provided Uncle Hugh could be kept in a good humour.

To keep Uncle Hugh in a good humour it would be necessary for her to see a doctor.

Very well, then, the doctor could be made most useful by ordering her to remain in London under his care.

That could be easily arranged also.

And since this business of seeing a doctor had to be gone through, it might as



well be gone through as speedily as possible—say to-morrow instead of next week or in ten days' time.

After all, matters were arranging themselves much more satisfactorily than they had seemed inclined to a little while ago. She had distanced Edie so easily with Phil, that she had possibly somewhat underrated a victory she had won without scratch or scar. Evidently Edie, though she could win her lovers, did not know how to keep them. As it had been with Phil, so should it be with Lord Winterdowne, or any other well-looking, tolerably distinguished individual to whose heart she, Ellinor Yorke, might choose to lay siege.

And as Ellinor sat thus, a mimic Alexander counting her worlds conquered and those which yet remained to overthrow, Lucy, coming into the room equipped for the morning's drive, paid her as sweet a compliment as any the beauty had ever had offered at her shrine.

"You have the loveliest colour in the world, dear, this morning," she said as she buttoned her black kid glove, "and your eyes are oh, so bright. You look as if somehow you had come into this world by mistake—I mean as though by right you belonged to another world where sorrow and pain, ugliness and death, were words without meaning."

Ellinor accorded her a gracious smile as she went out of the room to put on her own cloak and bonnet.

"You never were nearer the truth in your life, Lucy," she said in her low clear voice. "For me at this moment sorrow and pain, ugliness and death, are words without meaning."

#### CHAPTER XXXVI.

"SING before breakfast, cry before night," says the homely old proverb, and like most homely old proverbs, it is but a voice to thoughts which lie uppermost in many hearts. Some people put it another way—"If you get to the top of a hill, you must come down," they say; "Laughing and crying are near neighbours," and so forth.

Here is another example of the truth of these old homely adages. On the day after Colonel Wickham had held his reckoning with Phil, Lucy and Ellinor went driving forth in the keen, frosty air, with bright eyes, rosy cheeks, and light hearts. Lucy was beginning to feel that though life for her must of necessity be painted in sober colours, yet sober

colours were by no means sombre colours, and were by many shades removed from gloomy black. She was beginning somewhat to overcome her first terrible sense of bereavement, and, thanks to Mrs. Thorne's liberality, she had now a fair fortune at command. A fair fortune necessarily was a thing that opened the door to a good many pleasant probabilities and possibilities, and though she would gladly enough have surrendered it all for half-a-dozen kindly, heartfelt words from Rodney's mother, yet, nevertheless, it was not a thing to be despised. Besides, she had not yet given up all hopes of those half-dozen kindly words being spoken sooner or later. Some day she and Mrs. Thorne would be sure to meet, and if once they could see each other face to face, and talk about Rodney, things must come right between them, not a doubt. Meantime she had the dearest, best, most beautiful woman in the world for friend and benefactress; and she, too, was walking, so it seemed to her, day by day nearer and nearer to the goal on which her heart was set. What more in life could anyone expect than what she, Lucy Selwyn, had and hoped for?

These were some of the sources of Lucy's bright eyes and rosy cheeks. Ellinor's spring of joy did not lie quite so deep, and ran in a narrower channel. Self was its Alpha and Omega. "My beauty, my health, my wealth, my talent, my head-and-shoulder's-height above the common herd," its source; "My success, my triumphs, my happiness," the great ocean to which it tended.

"Ah," cried Lucy, startled for once into poetry by the glimpse of the park—trees, grass, pebbly paths, one mass of frost-jewels, "this is star-land itself. I hope heaven will be something like it!"

Ellinor nodded in the direction of big, bustling Piccadilly, towards which they were driving. "I hope heaven will be something like that," she said; "but there, I would rather not talk of heaven to-day; earth has far more attractions for me."

This was how they drove to the house of the esteemed medical practitioner, who was expected to endorse with professional authority every one of Ellinor's desires.

And this is how they returned. Two wan, sorrowful young women, one with tears running down her cheeks, the other as though she had suddenly been transformed into a marble likeness of herself; leaning back in their carriage, saying never

a word, shunning even a look one from the other's eyes.

All, forsooth, because the doctor, as he had applied the stethoscope to Ellinor's chest, had said briefly :

"There's mischief here. Get away to the south as fast as you can."

Ellinor knew what the words meant well enough. She had heard them said over Juliet exactly a year ago, and her mother had wrung her hands, gone down on her knees in prayer, and had then risen up, broken up her home, and started for Italy.

"Mischief here !" That meant the slow but sure creepings on of disease, the gradually increasing weakness, the terrible cough, the pantings for breath, the hunting about for warm, sheltered quarters, the fleeing before the breath of north or east wind, the eschewing of all pleasant places of resort, such as ball, theatre, reception-room, the huddling oneself up in wraps and respirators, the mere thought of which would drive a fairly healthy person frantic.

It meant the creeping out of the race of life, the standing on one side to let the rush and crush of the sound and vigorous ones sweep past. It meant the bowing of the head, the turning of the face to the wall, and then the long, long sleep.

Ellinor clasped her hands over her forehead, and leaned back on her cushions, while something between a moan and a groan escaped her lips.

"Oh, my darling !" began Lucy, turning towards her with clasped hands and streaming eyes.

"Be silent !" interrupted Ellinor imperiously. "Let me alone to think my own thoughts ;" and then she went on, silently cataloguing, not those things which she might keep and hold for her own, but those things which she had best give up of her own free will, before Death, with its rude auctioneer's hammer, transferred them to another lot, and knocked them down to a more fortunate bidder.

Winterdowne Castle, the coronet, the town house, the horses, the diamonds—these must be given up. They were the things that those who had years of life before them might try for and get ; not those whose time was cut down to a few handfuls of months held in a loose, begrudging clasp.

And all hopes of triumphs over belles and beauties of future seasons must go too ; all thoughts of winning lovers away from the sides of other girls, let them even be so provincial and insignificant as little Edie Fairfax.

What about Phil Wickham ?

Breaking right over the heads of her other thoughts came the question, sharply, imperatively, as one not to be put on one side without succinct answer.

It seemed to be repeated in even more distinct form as the carriage stopped at their own door, and the servant informed Ellinor that Mr. Wickham was upstairs in the drawing-room waiting to see her.

"Will you see him ?" asked Lucy, putting out a shaking hand from among her furs, and laying it on Ellinor's arm. And her eyes said : "After this—after this, can you bear to see anyone ? Will you not go into some quiet corner and rest your heart ?"

Ellinor shook off Lucy's hand.

"I will see him, and alone—see that we are not disturbed, Lucy," she answered almost defiantly. By-and-by, the conventionalities of her world would be defied and trampled underfoot by those uncouth, unmannerly churls, Disease and Death, who will bow to no written nor traditional laws of precedents and social etiquette. Why not take a leaf out of their book and be beforehand with them, as though she, too, were a monarch, and made and snapped conventionalities at will ?

As she entered the long, airy, swathed-up drawing-room, Phil, seated in a far corner, thought that surely never before had living woman owned to so royal, so imperial a gait. A Cleopatra, a Vashti, a Juno even, might have looked shambling and ordinary by her side.

The blinds were drawn down. The room had an unaired, seldom-opened odour hanging about it. Ellinor's long seal mantle seemed to bring into it the fresh, frosty air of the morning.

Phil advanced to meet her.

"I have come to say good-bye !" he said. "I'm off to Paris, Brussels, Geneva, or somewhere or other, by to-night's mail-train."

There was nothing royal or imperial about his gait. By her side he showed as downcast, as pale-faced, as graceless as it is possible for a well-knit, healthy young fellow of six-and-twenty to show.

Ellinor stood in front of him, looking straight at him with those beautiful, changeful, russet-brown eyes of hers. Twice her lips parted as though she would speak but could not. A whole troop of tumultuous thoughts, hopes, longings, despairs, seemed to go sweeping across her face like clouds across a noonday sky.

At last words came to her.

"It is I, not you, who should say good-bye," she said wildly, impetuously, and then she sank on a near sofa, covering her face with both hands.

Phil was startled, troubled.

"What is it? What has happened? Tell me," he asked anxiously.

Ellinor drew her hands from her face. It was blanched, bloodless, no cherry-red on lips, nor glowing carnations on cheek now.

"Only this has happened," she said in a low, strained voice. "Sentence of death has been passed upon me. Nothing more."

"Sentence of death—on you! Great Heavens, I do not understand!" stammered Phil.

"It is hard to understand, hard to believe, isn't it, that this I, sitting here talking to you, warm, breathing, living, will soon be put away out of sight, given up to the coffin, and the clay, and the worms?"

And Ellinor laughed a long, low laugh, all the time without a gleam of colour in lip or cheek, or the light of mirth in her eye.

"Good Heavens, I do not believe it!" cried Phil vehemently.

That grand woman seated there in her furs, young, supremely beautiful, with warm, quick blood coursing through her veins, to be confined and hidden away! Better doubt his own senses, his power of hearing and reasoning at once.

"I do not believe it—I will not believe it!" he cried again. "It is all some frightful mistake! It is not—cannot be true!"

"If you like to go to one of those admirable physicians whose name was in the list you gave me the other day, he will tell you that it can be and is true. Shall I give you his name and address?"

Phil drew a long breath.

"If the whole College of Physicians were to swear to it, yet I would not believe it," he said. "But at present, so far as I can see, it is only the opinion of one man that has been asked and had. Miss Yorke, you must not believe that this man's opinion is final. There are at least fifty or sixty as good as he. You must go to others, and hear what they have to say."

"Thank you. I have no wish to prolong the hideous prelude to the coffin and the worms." She paused a moment, then added in the same unnaturally calm voice: "Come, let us talk of something else. You are going away—when?—where to? Did you tell me just now? I have forgotten."

Fancy a condemned criminal turning round upon the scaffold and addressing a

party of tourists with "Have you your fishing-rods, gentlemen? I hope you will get good sport."

Phil seated himself on the sofa beside her.

"I cannot talk of myself," he said; "I feel bewildered—as though I were in the midst of a hideous nightmare."

"Ah, you will soon get used to the thought, face it, and then forget all about it. Yes, forget—forget—" She broke off, and then added in a more real, more natural tone than she had yet used: "Yes, that is the hardest, bitterest part of all, the being forgotten. I could stand being hated, abhorred, shunned, but the being forgotten is awful. For people to forget even what your face is like, how you looked when you were happy, how you looked when you were sad, how your voice sounded—"

Again she broke off. It seemed as though by thus cataloguing one by one the terrors of the grave she was trying to bring herself to face them and to look away their hideousness.

Phil felt choking.

"There are some voices, some faces, that can never be forgotten by those who have once heard or seen them." And, as he said this, it seemed to him that that white, beautiful face he was gazing at now so earnestly, so pityingly, must haunt him for evermore, sleeping, waking, no matter in what corner of the world he might hide, nor into what mad whirls of business or pleasure he might throw himself.

Ellinor did not seem to hear his interruption. She had pulled off her gloves, and went on talking, half to herself, half to him, as she looked down on and caressed her long, white, shapely hands.

"I've always taken such care of them—and now I must give them up to the clay and the worms. Poor hands! Fancy you after—"

Phil jumped to his feet.

"For Heaven's sake, stop!" he cried. "I cannot bear it! You'll drive me mad if you talk in this way."

She caught at his last word.

"Mad!" she said; "mad! If madness and death came hand-in-hand, half of the horrors of death would be gone. But they don't, do they, as a rule? No. We go down into the vaults open-eyed, open-eared; we know all about it; we've seen others go there before us; we know what becomes of them— But I forgot, you don't like to hear about these things. Why should you? They are a long way off from you.

Come, let us talk of something else. Sit down, and tell me where you are going first."

Phil, with something of a groan, sank down on the sofa again. But speech refused to come to his lips. Ellinor went on:

"I am glad you are going away. Shall I tell you why I am glad? I may as well speak the truth to you now. I am glad, because it puts us both, you and I, on one footing. We stand on one platform now."

Phil, in his amazement, turned half round on the sofa and faced her.

"I do not understand—I do not know what you mean," he stammered.

Ellinor removed her seal hat, and pushed her thick, low-growing hair from her brows. Colour had come back to her face. Her voice was calm and natural.

"I will explain," she said composedly. "What I meant to say was, we are on a level now, you and I; you are no longer in a pulpit high over my head preaching to me a miserable sinner at your feet. No; you have come down from your pulpit into the dust, and have done just exactly what the miserable sinner did."

There came a hot guilty rush of blood to Phil's face, but he stammered again:

"I do not see—I do not understand."

"What, I have not yet made my meaning plain! Perhaps your memory may help you to understand. You cannot yet have forgotten our meeting in the shrubbery at Stanham, and our talk about Rodney Thorne? How eloquently you preached to me on my lack of heart, told me how I had led your friend on to love me without a spark of love for him in my heart; how—"

But here Phil jumped to his feet with a bitter cry:

"Stop—in Heaven's name, stop! You don't know what you are saying," he said in a choking voice. "You do not—cannot mean to say that as you trifled with Rodney so I have trifled with you."

White, forlorn, half distraught, yet withal sharply conscience-smitten, he stood in front of her, looking down at her calm, all but smiling face.

"I do mean to say it," she answered, serenely returning his gaze. "As I spent long mornings with Rodney, giving him pleasant words, pleasant looks which meant nothing; so have you spent long mornings with me, playing with me, giving me sweet, pleasant words and looks, and all the while not one grain of love in your

heart for me. If it were not so, how could you go away and leave me now in my sore extremity?"

The last words were said plaintively, piteously.

"May Heaven forgive me!" groaned Phil, clenching his fingers into the palms of his hands till, white and bloodless, naught but sinews and outstanding veins seemed to show in them. "I was mad, I think. I knew not what I was doing. I came because my heart was broken—my brains were going."

Then in his agony he knelt on the ground at her feet, hiding his face in the hem of her dress, and crying aloud:

"Oh, Ellinor, have mercy upon me, pity me if it be possible! I do not—dare not ask you to forgive me."

"I forgive you," she said sweetly; "I will admit the plea you would not admit for me, poor sinner! I will say, how could he help it being what he was?"

Phil lifted up a white, wondering face to the calm, beautiful one that bent over his.

"Being what he was," she went on in the same sweet, low tone as before, "so handsome, so noble, so true, what wonder if she loved him, and broke her heart over him?"

Phil groaned again, and kneeling still, covered his face with both hands.

Ellinor's next words came in a whisper:

"I would not dare speak to you thus had I years of life before me, but with my death-sentence still in my ears, what can it matter what I say?" Her voice ended brokenly.

Phil drew his hands slowly from his face. Their eyes were close together now; his filled with a wild, dumb look of pain, hers with the dancing light of love.

Then all on a sudden there seemed to come a mist and darkness before Phil's eyes, a rush of blood to his brain, a sound as of ten thousand loud voices in his ear. Did her lips first touch his, or his hers? He could not say—he did not know; he only knew they met in one long, lingering, passionate kiss, and that there, as he knelt at her feet, she fell upon his neck crying, "Oh, my love, my love! I find you, I lose you, in one breath!"

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